

Using PaCT student progress reports with parents and whānau at Kairanga School

About us

We are a medium-sized rural primary school, located on the outskirts of Palmerston North and catering for students from years 1 to 8. Our mission statement is “For life we are learning”, and we seek to develop five key attitudes and attributes in our students that encompass the essence of the key competencies, our school values, and our New Zealand Curriculum: inquisitive, self-managing, co-operative, creative thinkers with high expectations.

We have a strong focus on inquiry learning and have developed our own sense of what inquiry means for us in the teaching and learning process. We started working with PaCT in 2014, and we first used the student progress reports with parents and whānau at the end of 2018. This is our story about why we started using the progress reports with whānau, how we developed our own material to go alongside the PaCT report, and how our community responded to the new reports.

The context for change

We’d been working with PaCT for a while, and it was embedded in our practice. We were also involved with the Ministry’s support schools network, so we knew that the student progress report was being designed specifically to be used with parents and whānau. We were ready and waiting when it was released in July 2018.

We used to produce our own end-of-year reports, which included data from PaCT. We used a word document template to produce a double-sided A3 sheet for each student which folded to become a four-page booklet. It was a very traditional format. The cover had a photo and the student’s name, and there was a double spread which included most of the learning areas. Health and physical education and art were on the back, with a checklist of information about the key

competencies and a general comment. There was a lot of teachers’ voice and teachers’ writing. Teachers made comments in every learning area covering interests, engagement, motivations, strengths, and anything else they had noticed. We used our PaCT data to provide an indication of whether each student was working towards, at, or above expectations, but there was no clear view of a student’s progress over time.

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As we thought about making changes to our reports, we really wanted to give parents and whānau clear expectations of achievement and a clear picture of their child’s progress in relation to those expectations. We were looking for something that would be useful to parents and whānau, but would also be helpful for teachers’ professional practice and less time consuming. We also knew we didn’t want to focus exclusively on reading, writing, and maths; we wanted something that included other learning areas.

The process of change

Once the student progress report became available in July, we went through the process of updating our end-of-year reports to include the progress report from PaCT. Our goal was to have our updated report ready to use by the end of the school year. Initially, our senior leadership team reviewed each of the four components of the progress report. We definitely wanted to use the progress chart as it provided a clear view of progress against expectations, like a Plunket graph.

We also wanted to use the descriptions, as we felt they provided some context for parents and whānau on the student's current achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics.

We needed to include information about students' achievement in other learning areas and the key competencies alongside the progress report, and teachers had given us the clear message that they wanted to keep some written report comments. To meet all these needs we came up with the idea of commenting on students' achievement in other learning areas under the headings of the key competencies, and we designed one sheet for this purpose. Together, the student progress report from PaCT and the key competencies report we developed made up our new end-of-year-report format.

We consulted a number of key groups as we developed the new format. We briefed the board on planned changes, the home and school committee were consulted, and I also gathered the views of teacher aides. Conversations with each group were informal and focused around two key questions: "Can you read it?" and "Do you understand it?" We used the information we gathered to refine the format and also to guide the information we provided to families before the new reports came out.

In the weeks leading up to the new reports going home we sent information to parents and whānau in our weekly newsletters. We spread this over several newsletters and included a description of the key elements of the progress chart, information about how to interpret the chart, and links to further information about PaCT on the curriculum progress tools website. We could have run an information evening, but we don't find that these are well attended. Once the reports came out, whānau also had an opportunity to meet with the teacher to discuss the report and ask questions, but not many took us up on this. Those who did come in were focused on understanding the PaCT progress chart and what it meant for their child.

Community response

Parents and whānau responded well to the progress report, and we got some good feedback about it. They felt that they had a clearer

understanding of how their child's achievement related to expectations; whether they were "doing OK". The most common concern was if the progress trajectory was plateauing. In these cases teachers talked through what was going on, what the school was doing to support learning, and how they could help at home. Parents and whānau also responded well to the key competencies report. We used to have a simple tick sheet which summarised this information, and this new version was much more descriptive.

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Teachers also responded well to the new format. They liked the clarity of the PaCT student progress report. It added a progress story that we didn't have previously, and they felt it was more professional. They also liked the key competencies report. It retained the teacher's voice, but they only had to provide about half the written comments that had been needed for the previous reports.

What next?

Looking ahead, we're planning to keep using both the PaCT progress report and the key competencies report for the next couple of years. We'll collect feedback as we go, but we'll give it a couple of years to bed in before we look at developing it further. At this stage we're thinking it's likely that our next steps will include investigating how we can involve students more in the reporting process. It would also be good to introduce a report at key points after a student's entry to school to give whānau a view of the progress that's been made, particularly in the first year of schooling.